



Congressman Edwards is a nationally respected champion for America's veterans who believes America has a solemn commitment to see that America's veterans are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve, and to see that our government honors their service and sacrifices not just in words, but in deeds.

Since becoming Chairman of the House [Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee](#), Chet has authored an historic increase of \$17.7 billion in veterans' health care and benefits, the largest increase in veterans funding in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The unprecedented funding increase helped improve services, reduce waiting times, ensure proper maintenance is done at VA hospitals, hire more than 3,100 claims processors to reduce the 400,000 claim backlog and the six month waiting times.

Congressman Edwards, along with Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, local leaders and veterans spearheaded the fight to keep the Waco VA open, as well as expand its mission as a National Mental Health Center of Excellence. Since 2006, Chet has secured \$7.3 million for innovative

PTSD research at the Waco VA. The record level of funding increases for the VA budget also increased the number of employees at the Waco VA hospital by 127, the Waco Regional office by 138, and made possible \$49 million for five new construction projects on the Waco VA campus starting in 2008.

Congressman Edwards efforts in District 17 for veterans also include helping to fund construction of new VA clinics in College Station and Fort Worth to better serve area veterans.

VA Begins Health Care Enrollment for Priority 8 Veterans

As a result of a new law authored by Congressman Edwards and passed by Congress last year, the VA is now enrolling some veterans with no service-connected disabilities previously excluded from VA health care. In 2003, income limits were imposed effectively blocking veterans with no service-connected disabilities from VA health care services. The VA is now enrolling veterans whose income exceeds current means-tested thresholds by up to 10 percent.

To determine if you qualify, go to the VA website at <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/> and use the income calculator. The calculator provides a format in which veterans enter their household income, number of dependents, and zip codes to see if they may qualify for VA health care enrollment. In addition to applying online, Veterans may also contact VA's Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222 VETS (1-877-222-8387).

Historic Increases to Improve VA Health Care and Benefits

- A \$17.7 billion increase to the VA's discretionary budget since the beginning of the 110th

Congress - a 44% increase to the baseline.

- A 40% increase to the Veterans Health Administration that has resulted in an additional 2,657 doctors, 11,509 nurses, 115 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, and 42 new Vet Centers.
- Increased the travel reimbursement to 41.5 cents per mile - a reimbursement that had been frozen at 11 cents since 1979.
- Re-opened Priority 8 enrollment for veterans with modest incomes.
- Doubled the amount provided for the Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program (from \$63.6 million in FY06 to current level of \$130 million).
- Added 7,100 claims processors - resulting in a 24% increase in claims processed (from 774,378 claims processed in 2006 to 958,275 in 2009).
- Established a historic New GI Bill - this new benefit will provide \$63 billion over the next 10 years for tuition assistance, educational materials, and housing assistance for our newest generation of veterans.

GI Bill for 21st Century

"Today, 65 years after the original G.I. Bill first became law, our nation has renewed its moral commitment to those who have served our nation in uniform with a new 21st Century GI Bill that opens the doors of our colleges and universities to our troops, our veterans and their families. The new 21st Century GI Bill says to our troops and veterans, just as you have invested your service to protect our nation's future, we intend to invest in your future by making the dream of a college education a reality."

- Congressman Chet Edwards

Background

Last year, Congress enacted the new GI Bill for the 21st Century (the “Post-9/11 GI Bill”) to restore the promise of a full, four-year college education for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, making them part of the economic recovery.

These benefits started August 1

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and will be available to an estimated 2.1 million veterans

. On May 1

st

, veterans were able to start applying for a certificate of eligibility for the new college benefits at the VA website

<https://www.gibill.va.gov/>

. And this year, Congress extended those college benefits to all children of fallen soldiers (with no minimum military service needed to qualify).

Who Qualifies

Generally, the measure provides up to four years of education benefits at a college or university for individuals with at least 90 days of active duty service on or after September 11, 2001 who

have been honorably discharged from service. The benefits are correlated on a sliding scale to the years served and to receive full benefits, you must have served on active duty for three years

To Determine Eligibility & Benefits, visit <https://www.gibill.va.gov/> or call 1-888-GI BILL-1 (1-888-442-4551)

GI Bill for Children of Fallen Heroes – Fry Scholarship

All children of active duty service members who have died on active duty since 9-11-01 are eligible for the full GI Bill education benefit on August 1, 2009, regardless of the length of military service of their parent in the service; these benefits expire 15 years after 18th birthday of surviving military children.

Background

Legislation authored by Congressman Chet Edwards and signed into law this past June expands GI Bill benefits to children of fallen U.S. service members and cover the full cost of a college education for each child of fallen soldiers.

The new benefit will be known as the “Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry” scholarship in honor of a fallen soldier with three young children from Edwards’ district. Under the current GI bill, beneficiaries must serve 6 years with an additional 4 year commitment in order to earn the right to transfer their benefits among their dependents. Edwards’ provision extends the full benefit to each dependent child and does not impose a minimum of military service to qualify.

“Nothing can make up for the loss of a parent, but my hope is that this sends a message of respect to every serviceman and woman that when you go into harm’s way for your country, our prayer is that you don’t have to give your life, but if that happens, we’re not going to forget your children.”

“No one has sacrificed more than the military child who has lost a parent.”

“This legislation is as meaningful to me as any legislation I’ve ever passed because who could be more deserving of our support than children whose moms or dads have died in military service to our nation.”

- Congressman Chet Edwards

Other veterans issues:

- Congressman Edwards wrote the bill that would block the proposed tripling of TRICARE premiums for military retirees. Edwards introduced the Military Retiree Health Care Protection Act (H.R. 816) to prohibit the Pentagon from putting this burden on the backs of military retirees. Parts of Edwards' legislation were included in the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 and 2008.

- Congressman Edwards led the fight to eliminate the Disabled Veterans Tax. The only federal retirees that are penalized for collecting VA disability benefits are military retirees, who are taxed a dollar of retirement pay for every dollar of VA disability pay they get. Congressman Edwards and others were able to partially phase out the Disabled Veterans Tax, but there are many veterans still left out. Congressman Edwards continues to fight for a full repeal of this unfair tax.

Chet's recognitions for dedication to troops, veterans, and their families:

- 2009 American Veterans Congressional Silver Helmet Award
- 2009 U.S. Army Commander's Award for Civilian Service
- 2009 U.S. Navy Distinguished Public Service Award
- 2009 Fleet Reserve Association Pinnacle Award
- 2008 American Legion Distinguished Service Award given to only one member of Congress
- 2008 Veterans of Foreign War Congressional Award
- 2007 Military Officers Association of America Award
- 2006 Military Coalition Award of Merit
- 2006 National Guard Association Charles Dick Medal of Merit
- 2006 Exemplary Legislator - National Association of Mental Illness' Veterans Council
- 2005 Military Order of the Purple Heart's National Inspirational Leadership Award
- 2005 National Inspirational Leadership Award from the Military Order of the Purple Heart
- 2004 American Legion Unsung Hero Award
- 2004 American Legion Meritorious Service Award
- 2004 "Going to Bat for Veterans" Award - National Disabled American Veterans
- 2004 Support of Military Families Award from The National Military Family Association
- 2004 "Going to Bat for Veterans" Award- National Disabled American Veterans
- 2004 Champion for Children - Military Impacted Schools Association
- 2003 Legislator of the Year--Association of the United States Army
- 2003 Harry S. Truman Award-National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
- 2002 USO Quality of Life Award
- 1998 Legislator of the Year from the bipartisan National Security Caucus.

Any thoughts? Comments? Questions? Let us know what you [think](#).

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